

VZCZCXYZ0008
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHAC #0322/01 1072143
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 172143Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5610
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL//SCJ3/SCJ33/SCJ34/SOCSO LNO//
INFO RUCNMR/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/USSOCOM WO WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 000322

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD; NSC FOR JOSE CARDENAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/12/2027
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PTER](#) [MASS](#) [SNAR](#) [PA](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTHCOM COMMANDER VISITS PARAGUAY

Classified By: DCM MICHAEL J. FITZPATRICK; Reasons 1.4(b),(d)

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Southcom Commander Admiral Stavridis visited Paraguay April 9 - 11, to meet and develop a relationship with his Paraguayan counterparts. MOD Gonzalez claimed he supported continued U.S.-Paraguayan military exchanges but asserted opposition leaders' were responsible for blocking U.S. military exercises. Armed Forces Commander Soto conveyed his concern that the U.S. is "losing" the region at the expense of growing Venezuelan influence but maintained that Paraguay is a friend in the region. Stavridis also met with the Paraguayan service commanders and visited the special forces headquarters. END SUMMARY.

MOD SHARES CONCERNS ABOUT CONGRESS, EXERCISES

¶2. (C) In his meeting with Admiral Stavridis, Minister of Defense Roberto Gonzalez stated that the Administration wanted to continue military exercises but that opposition resistance to those exercises complicated movement on the issue. Gonzalez also noted that they support the anti-terrorism efforts of the USG in the region but needed assistance to continue the fight against terror and other forms of international crime (particularly narcotics and arms trafficking). (COMMENT: Gonzalez' attempt to blame the opposition for problems in producing an agreement on U.S. military exercises does not track with our observations. President Duarte had his own reasons for objecting to an agreement and never even submitted our draft agreement for consideration. Post has consulted extensively with both Colorado and opposition party contacts and believe the majority remains predisposed to support our agreement. END COMMENT.)

¶3. (C) Separately, Gonzalez thanked the USG for its equipment support and requested additional support for the English Language Program at the MOD, which started in 1962. Admiral Stavridis said he would look into providing support for the English Language program and offered assistance in helping Paraguay develop a National Security Strategy as well as looking for other ways to strengthen our military relationship.

SOTO SAYS US MUST STAY ENGAGED

¶4. (C) Staviridis called on General Bernardino Soto Estigarribia, Commander of the Armed Forces, to discuss opportunities to strengthen the military-to-military relationship and convey his support of Soto's plan to reform

and modernize the military. Soto opened the discussion by expressing his concern that the USG was "losing the region" at the expense of growing Venezuelan influence. He stated that Paraguay remains the USG's only remaining friend and supporter in the region. Soto stressed that the USG must "stay engaged in the region and demonstrate leadership." He believes that Paraguay is vulnerable to the same Chavez type movements that have changed the governments in Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia. Soto is particularly concerned about former Bishop Fernando Lugo, who he sees as a threat to domestic social stability.

15. (C) In clear reference to public reports that President Duarte had been considering an "autogolpe," Soto opened by stating that the military is not interested in being involved in politics and pointedly stated that there must be a clear distinction between the military and the political leadership of the country. Soto is currently engaged in reorganizing the military and will submit a proposal to the Congress soon. He highlighted the budget for the military amounted to less than one percent of the total government budget. He noted the highest priority for the military were trucks to increase the mobility of his forces and communications equipment.

16. (C) Admiral Stavridis expressed his desire to strengthen the US-Paraguayan military partnership. The U.S. wants to support the Paraguayan military but will look for the GOP to establish its priorities first before exploring concrete ways to address them. Stavridis also pledged support for the military's English Language program (separate from the MOD program).

17. (C) COMMENT: Paraguay's inability to provide adequate resources to its military has severely hampered the capabilities of the military to complete its mission. Soto is the right man to reorganize the Paraguayan military and is someone the USG, particularly Southcom, can count on in the future. Small investments to help Paraguay obtain transportation and communications equipment through various forms of assistance could produce significant dividends in terms of contributing to a more stable, democratic Paraguay. We recognize some Paraguayan politicians oppose U.S. military exercises but we can preserve and strengthen our military relationship with Paraguay by continuing our equipment and material support to the military (particularly in the areas of counter-terrorism, peacekeeping operational support and IMET). END COMMENT.

18. (U) (Admiral Stavridis' Party did not have an opportunity to clear this report before departure.)
CASON